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Arthur Matsu's College Years: Historicizing His 1920s Experiences

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Arthur Matsu's College Years: Historicizing His 1920s Experiences

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from

The College of William and Mary

by

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Accepted for _____

(Honors)

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Abstract

Art Matsu, who graduated from The College of William and Mary in 1927, was its first Asian American student. But in recognizing that significance, we also need to examine the moments and circumstances that make him unique. This project further historicizes his experiences as a student, by attending to historical norms, trends, and attitudes that may still reflect upon Asian Americans today. By referring to relevant historical documents and scholarly works, as well as primary sources, I speculate on how attitudes and norms affected perceptions of Matsu in his day and how that historical moment continues to be of impact now.

Foreword

Saturday afternoon, on December 4, 1926, may not have been a consequential day in history, but it was significant for eleven men. Dubbed, “the Taskerites,” after their coach, J. Wilder Tasker, the William & Mary Indians varsity football squad stepped on the field to face their last opponent in the regular season, the University of Chattanooga Moccasins. For the eleven men, this game represented a culmination of a successful season defining the William & Mary football program as one of the best in the nation. But, the game had special significance for one individual, for the Indians’ captain, Arthur Matsu, The match would be the last of his William & Mary career. For Matsu, this game was a build up of four years leading the team as a “triple-threat” weapon, and using his remarkable athletic ability of passing, running, and kicking to help Coach J. Wilder Tasker build a successful football program (*The Evening Independent* September 2, 1925, pg. 7).

The game, as reported by *The Flat Hat*, did not start in the Indians’ favor. The Moccasins were quick to capitalize with large yardage gains, and scored a touchdown within the first five minutes of the game. However, the Moccasins failed to gain an extra point after missing a field goal, which would ultimately haunt them. The Indians’ defense made quick adjustments and were able to stymie the Moccasins’ forward passing attack for the rest of the game. Matsu consistently connected with his star receiver Macon, and the offense steadily progressed down the field, eventually scoring a touchdown. Coach Tasker, feeling risky, ordered Macon to try for a two point conversion instead of a field goal at the goal-line, but the Indians ultimately failed to capitalize on its offensive gains.

The battle showed the strength of the two ranked Southern teams. Tied with a score of 6-6, and with less than ten minutes in the fourth quarter, Matsu’s offense was held to a standstill by

the Moccasins. Rather than give up possession, Matsu drop-kicked the pigskin from the 47-yard line to give the Indians a 3-point lead. This ended up deciding the contest, solidifying the college's rankings in both the Southern conference and the nation. *The Flat Hat* credited all the senior players, particularly Matsu: "All of them played excellent ball in the game Saturday with the work of Matsu ranking with the classiest he has exhibited in his four years as quarterback for the Indians" (*The Flat Hat* 1926, 16(11), pg. 1-2). "Dauba" lavished praise on the Japanese American field general in the column, "Just a Word About Sports": "Captain Matsu literally finished in a blaze of glory Saturday against Chattanooga and soared to meteoric heights in the fitting climax to such a gridiron career as he has experienced with the warriors of the Green, Gold, and Silver" (*The Flat Hat*, 1926, 16(11), pg. 3).

Matsu was without a question one of the best athletes that the College has produced, even by today's standards. His 47-yard drop kick was a remarkable feat of athletic talent. This is a story about one man who left a lasting impact on the College in numerous ways, first and foremost, as an athlete, but also as a student and an individual. More importantly, he was noticeably different from his classmates. He was Asian American, a product of interracial marriage and immigration. He lived in an era where men of color were blatantly targeted by legislation, societal norms and attitudes, and Asian Americans in particular ways. This is a story that explores his difference, and how that difference was consumed by society at the time.

Introduction

In this project, I offer an analysis of Matsu's college experiences through historical and literary interpretations. In 2008, an Asian American Studies student conducted archival research to piece together a cursory biography of Arthur Matsu. Since then, the current information on him has been used to celebrate his legacy as the College's first Asian American graduate and first National Football League football player from the College (Powers 2014). The purpose of this paper comes with two aspects in mind. First, I endeavor to further historicize Matsu's college experiences by relating how his racial identity interacted with societal dynamics, including norms, trends, and attitudes toward Asian Americans, at the time. I argue that Arthur Matsu would be considered assimilated, while his athleticism subsumed his racial "difference" as a Japanese-Scottish American. In doing so, I attempt to offer historical explanations on the cultural and societal trends that shape Matsu's significance. Second, the paper serves as a foundation for a possible book project, which goes beyond the requirements of the completion of this honors thesis.

One cannot help but speculate: How were Matsu's experiences shaped by the norms, trends, and attitudes as an Asian American student at William & Mary? Did they work against him? Was his raciality considered exotic, and did it influence the way people perceived him outside of campus? By offering explanations that detail his significance, I scrutinize the implications that his "differences" as an Asian American may have in today's context. Seminal Asian American scholarship, such as works by Helen Zia and Ronald Takaki, document marginalized experiences, citing narratives and anecdotes that are demonstrative of the injustices faced by and the mistreatment of Asian Pacific American and immigrant communities. Matsu's narrative departs from this storyline, in which I speculate that his "difference" actually enhanced

his societal standing on and off the gridiron. There is almost a contradiction, given how Jim Crow laws at the time would have banned black people from entering the College, while allowing a Japanese Scottish immigrant to do so. Even more perplexing, Matsu was not marginalized on campus, but rather treated as a celebrity of sorts as a star football player, according to the few primary sources that remain.

Matsu's narrative offers a glimpse into how identity is fluid and circumstantial. His story challenges identity, particularly Asian American identity, as monolithic. While there were Asian Americans and immigrants toiling in Chinatowns in California, Art Matsu was hailed as one of the southern college's best football players. Asian American consciousness evolved in the years leading to and during Matsu's time in college. In a short period of time, Asian immigrants were exploited as a resource for cheap labor before quickly being viewed as threats to American society. The Japanese, as with all Asian immigrant groups, suffered degrees of prejudice, discrimination, and disenfranchisement. Uniquely, the Japanese readily adapted to American customs, and this section conveys the anxiety felt among the Issei, or the first Japanese immigrants, for their offsprings in face of open hostilities (Takaki 1987).

Matsu offers a case study for the general trend with Nisei participating in sports. However, I warn against assigning Matsu as the "exception" to the long string of Asian American scholarship. Is it unusual that an Asian American immigrant was able to fit in American society? Often, there are anecdotes on Asian immigrants who claim to have successfully "assimilated" into American society, but their differences are still apparent (Yu 2001). Art Matsu would later identify himself as "white" on the 1940 United States Census Bureau (National Archives 2016). The danger for future scholarship would be assigning Matsu as "white," even though he regarded himself that way. Tensions will always exist with his multi-

ethnicity and self-identity, and how they operate through a societal context. There is evidence that his “foreignness” is cited, as non-campus news outlets would repeatedly refer to him as the “Jap Quarterback” or “Japanese,” despite having been born in Scotland (*The Evening Independent* 1926). Rather, I seek to frame Matsu’s narrative to inform and to challenge future scholarship to explore the multi-dimensionality in Asian American identity. Historicizing one part of his life opens future Asian American scholarship to often obscure figures such as Matsu, whose identity is conditional to the ideological framework of American society. Many Asian Americans today may relate to the ideological frameworks that operated in his time. Today, this can be explained by the Perpetual Foreigner myth, which suggests that Asian Americans born in the United States are not truly citizens given their non-Caucasian appearances (Zia 2000).

I have assembled a theoretical framework to provide explanations for Matsu’s significance in Figure 1: (1) Athleticism, and (2) Academic Institution. I identify these two as major parts to examine further when historicizing his college experiences. I select these two factors because Matsu’s identity was shaped accordingly by his athletic gift, but also molded and consumed within an academic institutional setting.

Figure 1. Constructing a Theoretical Framework for Historicizing Matsu’s College Experiences

Figure 1. Constructing a Theoretical Framework
CHARACTERISTIC
Athleticism
Academic Institution

The first section, titled, **Part I** highlights Matsu’s experiences with an explanation of how an academic institution may have insulated his racial identity. There is a stark comparison toward the treatment of Asian immigrants and how Matsu fared on College grounds. **Part II**

provides a cultural context on Asian American identity in the United States during the 1920s.

Part III observes Matsu's athleticism and how it shaped his identity in College. By the turn of the twentieth century, sports became a defining part of American social life. Much of it may be attributed to the rise of muscular Christianity. This section also presents the rise of collegiate football aligned with the rise of the muscular Christianity movement. It was also at this time when Matsu was able to make a significant impact to a rising sport in American culture and society. His position as the quarter also contributed to his shaping his identity. The quarter, what we now call "quarterback" or commonly referred to as "quarterback" nowadays, is one of the most important positions for offense. The quarter is responsible for leading the team in key formations with the mission to score on the opposing team.

Art Matsu was born in Glasgow in Scotland to a Japanese father and Scottish mother in 1904. At a young age, Art moved with his family to Canada before settling in the United States in Cleveland, Ohio (Gottlieb 2005, pg. 1). There is little information about his early childhood, but important societal trends, norms, and attitudes at this time would shape his College experiences. For instance, in Ohio, Matsu grew up when professional football was developing and at its strongest in Ohio. Jim Thorpe, a legendary athlete, was recruited to play football after a successful career competing in the Olympics. He helped attract spectators throughout the state to watch these football games. Remarkably, Jim Thorpe, in a similar vein to Matsu, was also mixed race. His father was Irish and his mother was a Sac and Fox Indian woman (Smithsonian 2016). Growing up, Matsu distinguished himself early on with athletic ability, and was covered once by sport commentators as the "next Jim Thorpe" (Purman 1917).

If Ohio was the epicenter for professional football, Matsu's fate was to eventually meet J. Wilder Tasker, his future coach at William & Mary. Coach Tasker's own coach and mentor,

Knute Rockne, star player for the Notre Dame Fighting Irish, competed with and against Jim Thorpe for the Irish Squad (Maltby 1997, pg. 35-36). Matsu would play under a Rockne-style game design under Tasker, and the Notre Dame star, later turned coach, would visit William & Mary to host training workshops annually.

American society faced vast social, cultural, and economic transformations throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which historians commonly label as the Progressive Era. During this era, one would have observed rapid industrialization, coupled with massive immigration and nation-wide migration patterns. The term “modernization” signified social and cultural transformations, such as the Muscular Christianity movement and Orientalism. The rise of professional football may be attributed to this time period, too. But, in more ways than one, the academic institution resembles aspects of American society beyond its college walls, although the space is more limited in what may be tolerated or not. The next section addresses and speculates how Matsu operated within the academic institution, and how his identity was construed in a way that may be different from the greater American society.

Part I: Academic Institution

On September 24, 1926, the front page of the College of William & Mary's newspaper, *The Flat Hat* opened another academic year. Scanning down the page, there are the usual news items about faculty additions, recognizing the college with the nation's first honor system. However, one title would capture the reader's mind: "Klan to Give Flag Sunday." The small print states, "Imperial Wizard Evans Heads a List of Ku Klux Klan Notables Who Will Attend Presentation" (*The Flat Hat* 1926, 16(1), pg. 1). By the same token, there was another significant moment. Just to the left of the College President's picture reads a title, "Indians take Initial Game from Marines." In even finer print, "Matsu to Davis Passing Combination Again Proves Its Worth." The implications could not be any more stark. "Matsu" has an unfamiliar ring to it, implying a foreignness and to a certain extent, un-Americanness. There is no doubt that Art Matsu was in attendance that day when the flag was given and received by the College. Yet, no one seems to have noticed the significance with the page. It signified almost two contrasting worlds: one was in a "bubble" within campus and another was the real world itself.

The College of William & Mary molded and consumed Art Matsu's identity throughout his four years of attendance. To understand Matsu's significance, we must critically examine his "difference" as it relates to all Asian Americans: exoticism. Exoticism, in this context, serves to highlight "differences," leading to further justification for subordination (Park 2008, pg. 137). In Matsu's case, his exoticism as a Japanese-Scottish American enhanced his societal standing. In fact, we can only speculate that his exoticism was privileged, in sharp contrast to how most Asian Americans were viewed and treated. He was privileged because he came from a privileged space: college. While students may have come from a diverse array of backgrounds, the academic institution embodies privilege through intellectual elitism. He may have been accepted

on the basis of peaking intellectual curiosity more so than as a truly equal counterpart. What becomes visible is his obvious and immediate difference, which is his race, but how was he treated outside of the gridiron? In other words, what was the extent that his exoticism was privileged?

Race, subject to intense academic and intellectual curiosity, was constructed and experimental in academic institutions. There was room for some tolerance. Throughout the 1920s, immigration and race relations presented a threat to livelihoods for some, and these researchers and academics sought to find ways to resolve these issues. One such way was the concept of “assimilation,” which allowed men of color to become “Americanized” by adopting and affirming American culture and mannerisms. At the University of Chicago, sociologists studying the concept of “Orientalism” posed questions on how Asian immigrants could “assimilate” into American society. The University of Chicago led efforts for both the institutional and intellectual construction of the Oriental Problem that shaped academic thought about Asian immigrants in America throughout the first half of the twentieth century (Yu 2001, pg. 9). Robert Park, a missionary who collaborated with University of Chicago sociologists in drafting the *Survey on Race Relations*, helped explain the “assimilation cycle.” Orientals, in his view, as both immigrants and “nonwhite,” provided a link in researching race relations between African Americans and whites; the adjustment experiences for European immigrants, and race relations between Orientals and whites (Yu 2001, pg. 39).

I can only speculate how Matsu’s own racial identity was construed, and perhaps he was regarded as a fully assimilated Asian-American given his athletic feats. This represented a sharp contrast to working class Japanese immigrants or Japanese Americans. The working class had to protest the status quo. It could be speculated that given Matsu’s privileged position as a college

student, he might have been insulated from the travails of working class life simply because he was operating in a privileged space that allowed him to pursue extracurriculars and participate in the varsity football squad. By his senior year, Matsu established himself as a recognizable and popular man on campus. The academic institution allowed him to remain comfortable in a relatively safe environment. While outside news outlets tend to be harsher in their coverage of him, *The Flat Hat* had consistently touted Matsu's ability and character.

Modernization, if it were a national trend, trickled down to The College of William & Mary in the 1920s. By the time Matsu entered The College of William & Mary, it underwent change; transforming from a struggling small, liberal arts college into a modern, premier southern academic institution. Dr. Julian Alvin Carroll Chandler, the presiding College president during that period, oversaw the expansion of the school's academic programming and societal development, which had hitherto been unseen in the South. Art Matsu was not alone with his significance, but rather part of a series of factors that have influenced his moment. The College of William & Mary embarked on two ambitious fronts. Under the leadership of President Chandler, the academic programming was strengthened through aggressive recruiting. Throughout his four years, Art Matsu would have seen this firsthand. In fact, numerous well-known characters in William & Mary's history were also around. Dr. A. R. Goodwin, Professor for Religious Studies and later Bruton Parish Reverend, would be best known for convincing John D. Rockefeller to revitalize and to establish Colonial Williamsburg (Wilford Kale 2007). Dr. J. Lesslie Hall, known among the "Seven Kind Professors," would serve as Dean of Faculty and was a pivotal figure in reviving the College from its post-Civil War years. In Matsu's junior year, President Calvin Coolidge delivered remarks on the 150th Anniversary of Lee Resolutions.

Virginia Governor Harry “Flood” Byrd, freshly inaugurated the past January, descended to the Colonial Capital to witness the President speak.

The Chandler era saw women admittance to the College in 1918, and the development of women athletics when Matsu starred in the varsity football squad (Wilford 2007). On another front, Matsu came at a time when Coach J. Wilder Tasker had ambitions to establish a prestigious athletic program at the College. Matsu fit that need as a triple-threat football player in the Indian eleven squad.

The facts presented lead one to question whether the College truly touted “progress” even with Matsu’s enrollment as an undergraduate student. It would be a stretch to label Art Matsu’s tenure at the College as “progressive.” The College reflected the social norms and attitudes on race during its time, particularly as it was the Jim Crow South. *The Flat Hat*, the very newspaper that praised Matsu throughout his career, would be briefly shut down after its editor-in-chief published an editorial calling for interracial marriage and advocating for African American students just nineteen years after Matsu’s graduation (*The Flat Hat* 1945, 34(15), pg. 8). The College’s first black undergraduate student did not enroll until 1963, almost four decades after Matsu graduated.

Even further, one may venture to wonder how Matsu fit in within the context of racial dynamics during the Progressive Era. What made him different than a black undergraduate student? How did society come to terms with his raciality? The narrative becomes more perplexing when the Virginia legislature passed the one-drop Racial Purity Test in 1924. An article from the *Virginia Living* magazine frames the situation best: “[...] the state declared the marriage that gave Matsu life illegal” (Gottlieb 2005, pg. 46).

The seemingly inherent contradiction exposes a longstanding issue of where Asian Americans fit into the racial dynamics in the United States. Even more complicated, Matsu was one half Scot and one half Japanese. Was he considered more “white” than those of other ethnicities? Could he ever become “white” given his mixed background? The Progressive Era saw an obsession over assimilation as fears mounted opposition to immigration policies. As Japanese Americans and immigrants became targets for disenfranchisement, how did they go about assimilating within American society? The following section delves deeper into Asian American identity in the United States at the same time Arthur Matsu would have been an undergraduate at the College. It serves to highlight the disconnect between Matsu’s standing in college and that of most Asian Americans in the 1920s. In addition, it also sheds light on the dicey status of Asian Americans of the era.

Part II: Cultural Context of Asian American Identity in the United States

While race relations were definitive between blacks and whites, Asian American identity was more ambiguous. Asian exoticism was constructed and consumed as cheap labor toward the beginning of Asian immigration in the late 1800s. Later on, this exoticism became viewed as a threat to the very existence of American society. As a result, the Progressive Era oversaw a slew of legislation on both state and federal levels targeting Asian immigration, effectively halting it until 1965. A lot of the legislation that were aimed toward Matsu did not affect him. The most well-known is the Racial Purity Act (1924), banning interracial marriage in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The legislation passed through the General Assembly during Matsu’s sophomore year. I speculate that College insulated him from these threats. In fact, the school’s newspaper,

The Flat Hat, rarely reported news beyond the College walls. This section provides an overview on the perceptions of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans operating in American society.

Arthur Matsu was both the product of interracial marriage and immigration, and these dimensions of his identity were subject to either violent backlash to fervently curious intellectual exercises. His athleticism conferred him privileges on the field, but what about off the field? How did his Asian Americanness reconcile as he entered college, it was not clear how his status as an Asian-American would fit with the rest of American society. So far, there is no account on how he related to his Asian Americanness, other than news sources pointing out his Japanese heritage. Rather, we should focus on how Asian Americanness was viewed through a broader ideological context.

The Oriental Problem

Asian immigrants came to the United States in search for opportunity, particularly to earn a living (Chan 1991, pg. 25). American corporations saw opportunities to exploit free market capitalism with cheap labor, effectively shuttering aside labor union workers. In fact, American corporations went as far as sending agents to recruit laborers (Ibid). A pattern emerged as these migrant laborers threatened blue collar Caucasian workers. Once seen as an economic resource, Asian immigrants were quickly viewed as a threat to American ideals. Labor unions, given their political enfranchisement, lobbied legislatures and governments to pass restrictive covenants on any future Asian immigration. The situation was no better for Asian immigrants who already were in the States. Those who began to organize often found themselves shut out from any help from labor unions.

Asian immigrant “exotica” meant they were not Americans, nor would they ever be viewed as such. This was symptomatic of a wider trend that placed Asian immigrants in an

ideology of difference, centered around their exoticism, and the preservation of Anglo-Saxon ideals under the ideological framework of the time (Althusser 2001, pg. 106-107). These moments produce the marginalized experiences that may be explored throughout history. Every instance that Japanese laborers tried to become “assimilated” prompted a certain tainting of the white, Anglo-Saxon culture (Smith 2013, *The Guardian*) to conform to the status quo. When the Japanese-Mexican Labor Association (JMLA) applied for a charter from the American Federation of Labor following a strike for equal wages, AFL President Samuel Gompers reportedly declared, “Every incoming coolie means the displacement of an American, and the lowering of the American standard of living.” The JMLA never became affiliated with the AFL (Chan 1991, pg. 87). In this instance, Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans were disenfranchised, and almost treated as foreigners to their new homeland.

The Japanese Problem

Asian countries with respectable diplomatic relations with the United States encouraged their citizens to pursue opportunities abroad. Japan, in particular, followed this tradition, called *dekasegi*, which meant for the Japanese to leave home temporarily in search of employment in neighboring villages or prefectures (Chan 1991, pg. 12). There were reasons behind this motive. First, Japan had suffered from deep economic crises, driving families to explore for jobs abroad. Second, the Japanese government was eager to engage with the Western hemisphere in order to promote its culture and customs. Japanese immigrants, who traversed through thousands of miles overseas, would find themselves confronting challenges not limited to prejudice, political disenfranchisement, economic discrimination and social segregation. The years leading into World War II would be even bleaker for Japanese immigrants, including their offspring, who were forced to move into concentration camps.

Japanese immigrants were widely sought, and considered more favorable than Chinese immigrants, who had been. The rise of the sugar cultivation industry meant a greater demand for Asian immigrants, which included Japanese, Korean and Filipino workers, to Hawai'i. Native Hawaiians welcomed the Japanese migrants, whom they considered a more compatible "cognate" race to assist in repopulating the kingdom, preferring them to the Chinese immigrants (Chan 1991, pg. 27). By the 1920s, the Japanese American population reached 220,596, along with increased hostilities toward the population. Japanese immigrants found themselves sharing a familiar fate with Chinese migrant workers, except with a twist. The Japanese government, cognizant of how Chinese immigrants were treated, took an active interest in their countrymen's welfare (Zia 2000). They urged Japanese immigrants to assimilate with American values. The plan backfired, and the Japanese found themselves condemned as even more "dangerous" than the Chinese for readily integrating (Zia 2000, pg. 29-30).

White anxiety was substantiated by immigration, migration, religion, and an obsession over the meaning of masculinity. These factors all worked simultaneously, without any particular order or extent of influence. Seen as more of a threat than a valuable resource, Japanese immigrants were targeted by state legislatures across the country. The United States Congress passed laws restricting the meaning of their citizenship due to public furor. In the 1920s, a newspaper publisher V.S. McClatchy testified before Congress: "Of all the races ineligible to citizenship, the Japanese are the least assimilable and the most dangerous to this country...They never cease to be Japanese" (Takaki 1987, pg. 209). Legal ramifications codified legitimate disenfranchisement to Japanese immigrants, in comparison to pay discrimination experienced on the sugar plantations.

Starting with President Theodore Roosevelt's administration, the Japanese government worked quietly with the United States government to restrict Japanese immigration into the United States, culminating into what is known today as the Gentlemen's Agreement. President Roosevelt took further action by issuing Executive Order 589, barring picture brides from entering the country. Japanese immigration effectively ended with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which barred entry of "aliens ineligible to citizenship" (Chan 1991, pg. 57).

The Japanese Response

I may only speculate that Matsu's parents encouraged their son to pursue sports when migrating from Canada to Ohio in response to fears that he would not otherwise be able to fit in with the rest of society. This was common practice among Japanese immigrants and their children (Niiya 2000, pg. 14). The Issei, anxious by the slew of restrictive covenants aimed at barring naturalization, were determined to quickly assimilate to American ideals. Yet, there was also anxiety among the Issei generation that their offspring would "forget" their Japanese heritage. The rejection by their adopted country spurred the Issei community to take a holistic approach on sports for the Nisei generation.

Japanese immigrants were hopeful that sports would help their offspring avoid the discrimination and prejudices that their parents faced (Chan 1991, pg. 46). Not only did organized team sports encourage "Americanization" and largely kept the Nisei engaged with American society, but also sports became a conduit for transnational experiences. Traditional Japanese sports such as sumo wrestling allowed the Issei to build bridges between Japanese heritage and "home" in America. The Issei viewed this as crucial, and as anti-Japanese sentiment

grew louder throughout the 1920s, they became concerned with expulsion from the United States for their “foreignness” (Niiya, 2000, 22).

Sports afforded Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans not only a chance to “fit in” with American society, but to also have a fall back option in case their homeland rejected them. Matsu experienced a different case than the rest. Again, based on a lack of information, I can only speculate that there was no intention for Matsu to return to Japan, as other Issei intended for their children. Rather, notably, I believe the push for Matsu to assimilate by his parents was a result of the growing popularity of American football and his mother’s, who was a native of Scotland, experiences with a similar sport: rugby.

Rugby traces its traditions back to the 1840s in European states, and its popularity has been attributed to Thomas Hughes’ *Tom Brown’s School Days* (Maltby 1997, pg. 4). The book was based on the premise that sports built proper Christian character (Putney 2001, pg. 20). Matsu’s parents were most likely aware of the sport, and its rising popularity and impact on society and culture. Eventually, rugby football was brought over to the United States, but gained minimal traction. I contend that the sport was regarded as “foreign” for American tastes. However, there were elements that were attractive for Americans to want to play the sport. American football emerged to resolve any differences from European culture, and enabled individuals to cultivate an “American” style to playing football. Early American football became not just a favorite American pastime, but also as a crucial cultural metaphor reflecting the social movements during the Progressive Era (MacCambridge 2004, pg. xviii). By the time Matsu arrived to the United States, American football reflected these movements that he would ultimately focus his athletic talents throughout his childhood and eventually high school.

Cultural Context for Collegiate Football

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.

(Cor. 6:19-20; New International Version)¹

American football reflected a yearning for physically strong, muscular, and morally upright white men. This tied with the muscular Christianity movement, which dominated social and academic spheres from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, until it declined after the First World War. The development of early American football was a response to the rising muscular Christianity movement, which renewed calls for Christian commitment to health and manliness (Putney 2001, pg. 11).

Professional American football traces its roots to organized collegiate football. There are several explanations offered as to why college was an ideal place for American football. First, a college setting permitted muscular Christianity to save maturing young boys from the dangers of “overeducation” in academia (Putney 2001, pg. 28). Football was a natural remedy to counteract this perceived problem. Second, college offered a privileged space and time for young, aspiring individuals to participate in such contact sports.

Football offered an outlet for young white adolescents to prove their masculinity. The sport became a way to reinforce white male elitism. Social scientists attributed physical fitness as an indicator to an Anglo-Saxon’s overall standing in advanced civilization. There were concerns that over-education led to incomplete yet necessary growth from a boy to a man, otherwise

¹ Putney, Clifford. *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001, pg. 11.

known as the “Boy Problem” (Putney 2001, pg. 99). Diagnosis of *neurasthenia*, a disease thought to have only affected the most highly developed, particularly the most religiously “advanced” races was a common phenomenon in this time period, as physicians prescribed adolescent patients with more exercise. Men were encouraged to pursue athleticism, or the “strenuous life,” as President Theodore Roosevelt had, to keep up with the vast changes in society (Putney 2001, pg. 28).

There was a certain element of both physical and mental brutality associated with football. In fact, this was how American football came to evolve over time. Walter Camp of Yale University is regarded as an innovator in the game’s design, and is often credited with transforming European rugby to a more distinct and recognizable American brand of football. He was influenced by Social Darwinist theories, and this was reflected in his ideas for evolving the game of football. He developed a game that depended on physical might and stressed the “survival of the fittest” on the field (Maltby 1997, pg. 17-18). There were parallels to war, as the quarterback position became akin to a field general leading his troops toward a long, tough march against their opponents to score. It made boys into men, or “warriors,” as Matsu would sometimes be called by *The Flat Hat* throughout his four years.

And brutal the game was. Violence was a central tenet in early collegiate football, prompting tensions between the enthusiasm for and an abhorrence to the brutality of the sport. Thirty men had died from playing football by 1909, while another two hundred and sixteen suffered some form of injury (Maltby 1997, pg. 34). Public outcry prompted a series of administrative and rule changes to the game. At times, prominent national figures, most remarkably, President Theodore Roosevelt, were compelled to implore for a safer, less savage sport. Nevertheless, spectators flocked to games to support their teams, romanticizing the gore

and possibly, death in a hard-fought match. *The Flat Hat* described football games similarly to how one would describe wars and battles. This romanticism was linked to a rising muscular Christianity movement, which was a concept of manhood and football as a venue to prove one's masculinity has been attributed to the sport's rising popularity. Matsu, even with his Japanese American identity, may not have had to prove his manliness or his race. In fact, his athletic prowess as a Japanese American could be explained at the time by the idea that his athletic talents came from his European lineage, often seen as the more superior (Putney 2001, pg. 6). This can only be based on reasonable speculation. Regardless, William & Mary football would become synonymous with Matsu for the four years he played on campus, merging with an identity that he was a star athlete and not necessarily just a Japanese American student.

Matsu and the Indians Eleven

The sport was relatively young when Matsu played, and bared more resemblance to rugby from Europe. The William & Mary football squad was established in 1893, thirty-three years before Matsu captained the squad his senior year. At the time, as with most colleges throughout the States, the game was virtually nonexistent and unknown in Virginia. (*The Flat Hat* 1926, 16(9), pg. 7). The William and Mary football program would not be established and strengthened until J. Wilder Tasker was hired as head coach and the college's director of athletics. College officials may have regarded the sport as a way to increase their prestige and enrollment, and hiring the ambitious young individual fit their needs.

Matsu's athletic prowess became a defining part of his identity on campus, and often times his racial identity became submerged as a secondary characteristic. This is evident in *The Flat Hat*'s first coverage of him in his freshman year. The only background information mentioned was the newspaper referring to him as "the Ohioan" to identify him as non-Virginian.

At the start of his freshman year, Art Matsu received little coverage in *The Flat Hat* opening issue for the 1923 academic year, other than that he received a spot on the twenty-five man roster for the Varsity Squad under Coach Tasker's purview. Matsu was substituted into the exhibition game against the Norfolk Fire Department eleven, and made no remarkable plays (*The Flat Hat* 1923, (13)1, pg 1). Outside media coverage highlighted his race, and this was evident throughout his four years as he achieved increasing fame each year. When he was elected captain, outside news sources issued headlines such as, "College Picks Jap to Captain Gridiron Team" while the campus newspaper, *The Flat Hat*, rarely mentioned his ethnicity. In direct contrast, *The Flat Hat* coverage for Matsu's captaincy amounted to merely the following: "Art Matsu Elected 1926 Grid Captain; Placed on Evans' Southern Honor Roll" (*The Flat Hat* 1926 15(13), pg.1).

A closer examination of the varsity squad presented two observations. First, with the exception of Matsu, all of them were white. The majority of the eleven squad were also native Virginians. He was also among the smallest, a fact that would be accentuated by outside news coverage. When he was accepted to the varsity squad his freshman year, the following was reported of him: "Art" Matsu, height 5 ft. 9 in., weight 143; quarterback and captain, East High School, Cleveland (*The Flat Hat* 1923 13(1), pg. 3). The freshman Matsu won the starting quarterback position, beating two native Virginians for the signal-calling helm and paving the way for a brilliant career on the gridiron. His remarkable talent early on would prove rewarding when he was elected captain by his senior year and led the Indians to defeat a long-term rival, the University of Richmond Spiders.

Matsu would continue to receive coverage on his spectacular play-making abilities, whether a forward pass or a long field goal, thus elevating his profile on campus as a star athlete. In the game against Delaware, Matsu was praised for his leadership and talent. *The Flat Hat*

wrote, “‘Art’ Matsu played a great game at quarter, and generalled his team with brilliant leadership” (*The Flat Hat* 1923 13(8), pg. 3). The little to no mention of his ethnicity showed his identity was immersed by his play-calling ability and tremendous talent. He was privileged, in sense, by evading the “difference” factor that many Asian Americans struggled to address by virtue of his position as quarterback and as an important football player.

If football allowed Matsu to submerge his racial identity, how was his treatment off the field? *The Flat Hat* and *Colonial Echo*² suggested he fit well among his peers. According to his profile in the 1927 *Colonial Echo*, he was part of the Omicron Delta Kappa, Alpha Kappa Psi, and the secretive “13” Club. He also served in leadership roles for the Monogram Club and as Secretary of his Freshman Class for the student government. The list of his extracurricular activities exemplify that he was considered and treated as a student, much like anyone else in his class year would. Football contributed a major part to his assimilation, but I identify another equally important factor: the academic institution. While he was able to avoid questions about his own raciality, he was no doubt exposed to conversations concerning race as a usual occurrence.

² The College of William & Mary’s official yearbook club.

Conclusion

After graduating with a degree in Business Administration and Economics, Art Matsu followed his predecessor, two-time Indians captain John Todd in returning to his alma mater to coach the freshman football squad. He would eventually leave William & Mary once and for all, taking his talents to pro-football, the Dayton Triangles. Though his tenure with the Triangles would be brief, he would have had embarked on another significant moment. He would have played with Walter “Sneeze” Achiu, a Chinese-Hawaiian who was the first Asian-American professional football player in the National Football League (Gottlieb 2005, pg. 46).

This project fits one piece into a puzzle, which is Art Matsu’s life and significance, and offers a glimpse of an individual ingrained with significant meaning in relation to our understanding of history, past, present, and future. However, there is pushback that Matsu himself was anything significant. I offer an observation made by Marxist scholar Louis Althusser, who contends that individuals are “always-already” subjects within the context of ideology. Therefore, an individual is always-already a subject, even before he is born (Althusser 2001, pg. 119). Rather, Matsu was significant given the context of his time, in a period of a modernizing world feeds into much of today’s society.

In order to do so, I identify and deconstruct particular aspects that made Art Matsu significant. This way, one may lend a greater appreciation for the multi-dimensional characteristics that made him unique as an individual. In *The Evidence of Experience*, Joan W. Scott (1999) considers the forces that shape dominant historical narratives, and in particular, how marginalized experiences are incorporated into our “foundational” historical perspectives. She further argues that this provides a limited scope to understanding historical experiences. Rather, historical narratives are multi-dimensional, and not as black and white as foundational

perspectives assert. The current details on Matsu's college years, compounded with sparse primary sources, endangers his remarkable success by marginalizing the significance of his experiences as the first Asian American graduate. According to Scott's own description above, our "foundational" historical perspectives subsumed Matsu's own narrative. As the paper has attempted to convey, his experiences were unique given his circumstances. At the same time, he was a product of interracial marriage and an immigrant, and given how American society reacted to immigration and racial dynamics garnered more significance to his popular standing at College. This project frames his experiences by offering historicizing and speculating his significance, and if it serves no more than to open minds to further thought and discussion, then I have accomplished what I sought to do.

Matsu was a gifted individual possessing athletic talent, which was highly coveted and respected in American society. He played at a time when collegiate, and eventually professional football, became increasingly significant both culturally and socially (Maltby 1997, pg. X). His exoticism was proven to work in his favor, bolstered by ability. As *The Evening Independent* wrote: "Japanese football players are unusual" (*The Evening Independent*, Feb. 6, 1926, pg. 7). The College of William & Mary provided a safe space for Matsu to participate as a fully assimilated member of the community. At the same time, YMCA continued to retain a sizable presence on campus, publishing advertisements and reporting past meetings on *The Flat Hat*. This is highlighted by his involvement in extracurriculars beyond the gridiron, proving that his exoticism did not limit perceptions of him.

There is no doubt he distinguished himself the most throughout his College years, but there remains incomplete details to his life. First, there is a complete lack of detail on his family biography. I take a great interest in his father's background, particularly reasons why he may

have immigrated to Scotland. Given the time period around Matsu's birth, I can reasonably speculate that his father lived during the time of the Meiji Restoration, which was a period that reflected a modernizing Japanese Empire. How about Matsu's mother? How did the parents meet, and improbably marry a short time after?

Second, Matsu's childhood would add an important context leading to his college years. My project takes into account his athletic ability starting his freshman year, but greater details into when he started and his impact throughout high school may also yield a more complete narrative on his life. As noted above, I can only reasonably speculate that his family encouraged his athletic participation to help assimilate him better with American society. To what extent was this true?

Questions come to mind of how Matsu fared after College as well. How did society regard him beyond his football talents? There ought to be more on his professional football career. How was the coverage similar or different than when he played and captained for the William & Mary Indians? Furthermore, what was his relationship with Walter "Sneeze" Achiu? How were the two treated by the coaching staff, fellow teammates, and by spectators? How was his transition from playing professionally to settling down as a retired athlete? I believe most of this can only be answered through speculation, but great perspectives may be taken from two Asian American professional football players in football's nascent development.

Finally, further guidance would to observe how the College of William & Mary compared to other Virginian institutions. The *Virginia Living* magazine cited, "a smattering of Chinese students beginning to attend Virginia colleges, especially VMI (Virginia Military Institute). A comparison of their experiences would provide a well-rounded appreciation for Matsu's experiences at William & Mary (Gottlieb 2005, pg. 46). More research on how earlier

mixed racial athletes, such as Jim Thorpe, adds another dimensionality to Matsu's narrative should include looking into how women's entry shifted the dynamic on campus. This project has served its purpose as an overview, and provides an important step toward future research and study.

Gallery 1: *The Flat Hat's* Coverage on First Organized William & Mary Football Team

First William and Mary Football Team Was Organized by Charles Hepburn 33 Years Ago

Football as an organized college sport made its first appearance at William and Mary in 1893—thirty-three years ago, and just two hundred years after the founding of the college. Students may wonder how on earth a college could exist 200 years without football. As a matter of fact, it did not; footballs were kicked around the campus long before most of the colleges that now rule the football world were ever thought of; but the first team to represent the college in games with outside teams was organized in 1893 by Charles L. Hepburn of Old Church, Va. Mr. Hepburn came to William and Mary from Episcopal High School, where he had played football, on the school team.

The game was then almost unknown in Virginia, comparatively speaking; very few of the students who came to the college in those days had ever played football before, or at least not the standard college game, and many of them had never seen a game played. Mr. Hepburn undertook the task of building a football team from this green material, and that fall

the team played two games, losing to the Norfolk Athletic Club in Norfolk, 16 to 4, and beating the Old Dominion Club, of Norfolk 8 to 0.

It may be interesting to note that the college authorities would not allow the team to leave college for a game during the session, so the players took advantage of the Thanksgiving holiday to make their trip to Norfolk, and the first football game ever played by a William and Mary team was played on Thanksgiving Day, 1893.

The game with the Old Dominion Club was played in Williamsburg, on a field which had been cleared of stumps and brambles by the students who were interested in athletics. In the game "Silent" Parker, William and Mary end, distinguished himself by throwing an opposing end over the fence which encircled the field, causing great mirth among the spectators. In the following year the college played its first intercollegiate games, in which some of the members of the original team played an important part.

First William and Mary Football Team

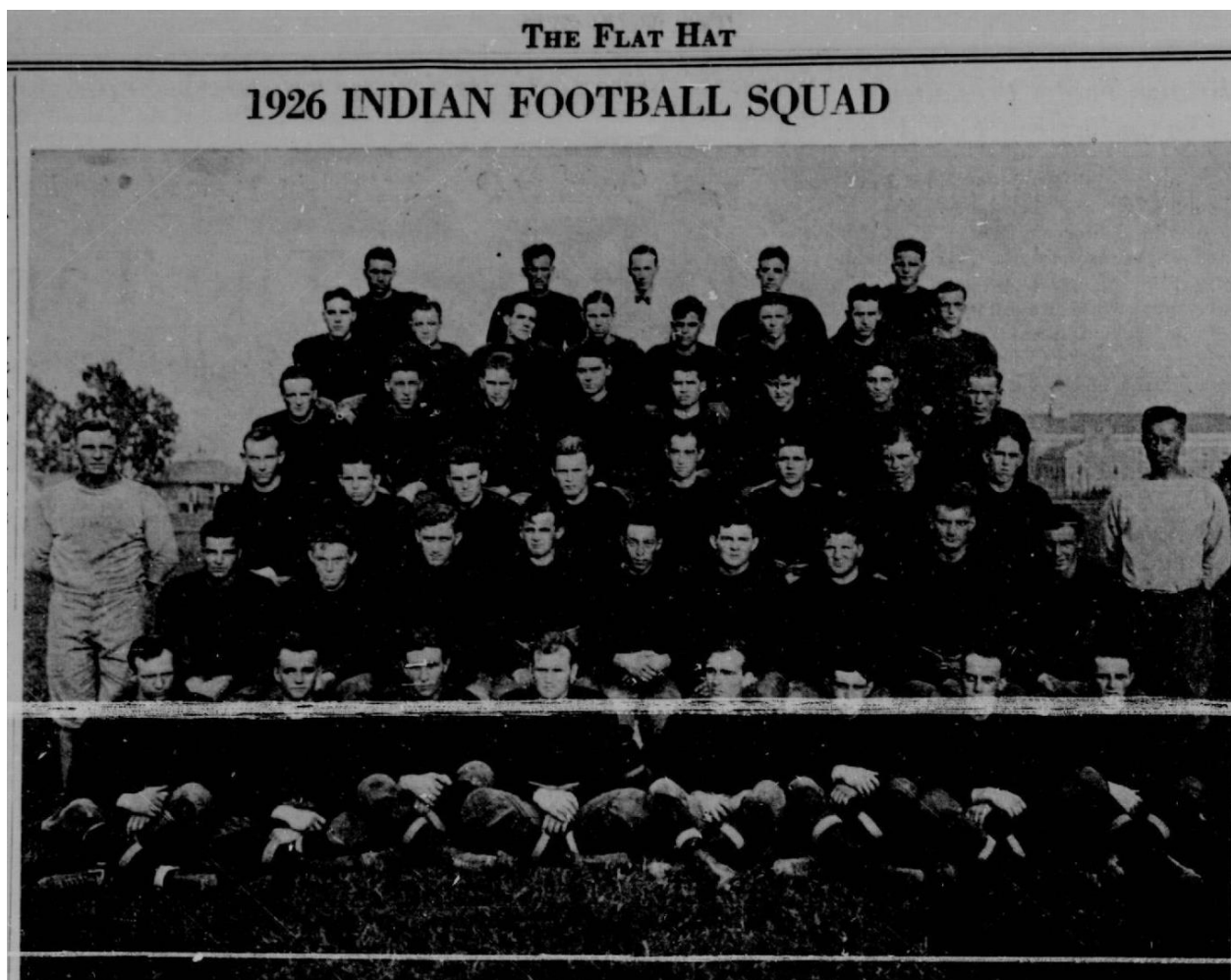


Left to right, upper row (name of first man unknown to editors)—Tyson, substitute; Charles L. Hepburn, coach and manager. Second row—Haines, halfback; H. Loeck, sub; Robertson, center; John Campbell, left guard; Brinkley, right guard. Third row—Parker, end; Radcliffe, sub; Humphress, fullback; Oscar Lane, tackle. Bottom—Jack Brown, left tackle; Ben Rowe, right guard; Lamb, quarterback; Lloyd P. Hepburn, halfback; John W. W right, sub.

This excerpt was reported by *The Flat Hat* during Art Matsu's senior year. It chronicles the founding of the Indians football squad. As noted, the College was initially opposed to letting football games from interfering with students' academic courses, which was prevalent in most colleges in early American football development (Maltby 1997). Eventually, J. Wilder Tasker would be hired by the College, where he embarked on an ambitious vision to bolster the College's reputation as not just a preeminent academic institution, but also a prestigious institution boasting strong athletics.

Gallery 2: Arthur Matsu Senior Year Profile in the 1926 *Colonial Echo*

This is one of the most definitive sources on Matsu beyond his football career. One would notice that Matsu was invested in campus activities, even leading student organizations such as the Monogram Club and representing his freshman class as its Secretary to the student government. This provides evidence that suggests his “difference” as an Japanese American did not deter his participation from campus wide activities and extracurriculars.

Gallery 3: The 1926 Indian Football Squad

Art Matsu is sitting comfortably at the center with his teammates. To his right is Coach J. Wilder Tasker outfitted in white, who would go on to continue to influence Matsu in his post-College years. Notice every single football player is white, with Matsu being the exception. This was common throughout early American football development.

Gallery 4: Art Matsu is Elected as Captain for 1926 Football Season

Art Matsu Elected 1926 Grid Captain; Placed on Evans' Southern Honor Roll

Art Matsu, of Cleveland, Ohio, three years a star quarterback on the Indian varsity, was elected Captain of the 1926 William and Mary grid team at a meeting of the varsity letter men held during the football banquet on December 18. The election met with the approval of students, alumni, and followers of the green, gold, and silver team, all of whom were anxious to see the heady Indian field general lead the team next season.

Matsu came here Three years ago from the East High School in Cleveland. He made a reputation for himself in his Freshman year, scoring the only three points made against Syracuse that season with a field goal. Since that time his fame has spread continuously until this year when he was mentioned in some quarters as all-American material. He was picked by Billy Evans as one of the South's best quarters this year. Art is a pole vaulter and is also active in non-athletic phases of student life. He served the freshman class as vice-president in 1923 and has maintained himself as one of the campus leaders since that time.

Football material will be abundant at William and Mary next fall. Besides several of the old veterans, there will be a large number of new men in Indian uniforms. Under the tutelage of Coaches Tasker and Todd with the leadership of Art Matsu the team should be a record making aggregation.

NEXT GRID CHIEF



Art Matsu, star quarterback on the Indian eleven, who just before Christmas was elected to pilot the 1926 team. The heady field general will play his fourth year with the Tasker tribe next season.

Art Matsu '27 was elected as captain to the varsity football squad. The college's newspaper, *The Flat Hat* would cover Matsu in a favorable light all throughout his four years. Even more remarkable, the paper refrains from mentioning his mixed-race or ethnicity, unlike other outside news outlets would. His athletic ability was not linked to his ethnicity, and was comparable to any other team members.

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The Flat Hat. (1923, September 28). Coach tasker picks varsity squad. *The Flat Hat*, (13)1. pp. 3

The Flat Hat. (1923, November 16). Delaware eleven bows to Indians in brilliant battle. *The Flat Hat*, (13)8. Pp. 3

(Gallery 1 picture) The Flat Hat. (1926, November 24). First William and Mary football team. *The Flat Hat*, (16)9. Pg. 7

The Flat Hat. (1926, November 24). First William and Mary football team was organized by Charles Hepburn 33 years ago. *The Flat Hat*, (16)9. Pg. 7

(**Gallery 3** picture) The Flat Hat. (1926, November 24). 1926 Indian football squad. *The Flat Hat*, (16)9. Pg. 7

The Flat Hat. (1926, December 10). Indians Defeat Chattanooga by Score of 9 to 6: Captain Art Matsu wins game with field goal. *The Flat Hat*, (16)11. Pg. 1-2.

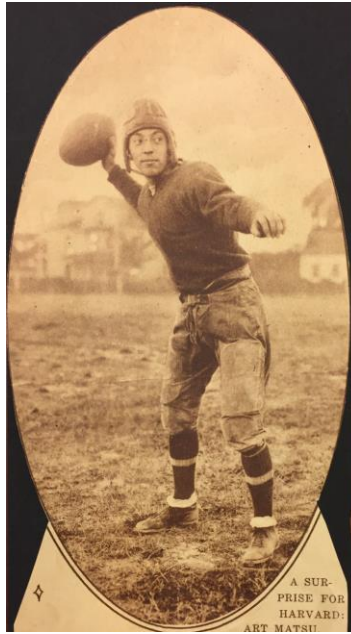
The Flat Hat. (1926, April 16). Dr. Goodwin accepts call to return as rector of the old Bruton Parish church, *The Flat Hat*, (15)24. Pp. 1

The Flat Hat. (1926, April 30). Coolidge will come here to celebration, *The Flat Hat*, (15)26. Pp. 1 & 8.

(**Gallery 4** picture, *right*) The Flat Hat. Next grid chief. *The Flat Hat*, (15)13. Pg. 1

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